

Teaching and Learning in Korean Classrooms: The Crisis and the New Approach

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Learning no longer takes place as effectively as it did before in most current Korean classrooms. Many teachers have voiced concerns about a notably reduced level of students' interest in and enthusiasm for learning school materials, lack of students' attention to their lectures, and lack of students' involvement in classroom activities. This negative change, which has been observed since around 1997, is often referred to as "school collapse" in Korea, meaning classroom breakdown.

The paper investigates the factors that have led to the phenomenon of the school collapse, introduces the 7th National Curriculum as one of the new reform approaches of the Korean government, and makes some suggestions to ensure more autonomy and diversity in classrooms to promote effective teaching and learning.

Key Words: school crisis, school collapse, classroom breakdown, teaching and learning, the 7th National Curriculum

Problem Statement

"Attention!"

It's the first period on Monday in a Korean high school. When the teacher comes into the classroom sliding the door, the president of the class calls for the students' attention. Still there are seven or eight students who are not back to their seats or who are talking to their neighboring classmates. Another four or five kids lower their heads, reading a high-teen romance. The rest of the class is just looking at the teacher without real attention or interest.

"Good morning, everyone! How was your weekend? I was..."

"Give that to me!"

A yell comes from the back of the classroom as soon

as the teacher starts talking. Two students are additionally fighting each other over a poster of H.O.T., one of the teenagers' idol singing groups in Korea. When the teacher bangs on the table with his baton, the whole class becomes quiet at the same time.

"Open your book!"

The teacher explains about today's lesson and tells the students to read the texts. Before long, several kids are yawning here and there, some kids snoozing from the first period in the morning, and some handing a few folded secret notes to other kids. The teacher keeps on teaching, ignoring them.

"Teacher!"

All of a sudden, a student raises his hand, asking, "Can I go to the bathroom now?"

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This is a description of a classroom reported by a despondent Korean teacher (Ministry of Education, 1999). The significance of this report lies in the fact that this is not just an unusual case happening in a particular region of the country but a prevailing recent phenomenon often found in many primary and secondary school classrooms across the

country (Chun, 1999). In a study by Yoon, Lee, and Park, 87% of the teachers believe in the prevalence of this phenomenon, and 71% of the students believed that the similar phenomenon existed in their schools (Yoon et al., 1999). Additionally, the media has reported and aired some shocking scenes of disrupted classrooms (Korean Broadcasting Station, 1999). The argument for the existence of a school crisis from these teachers and media is now gaining the validity and support from the general public including parents.

When examined with students' behaviors, the symptoms of crisis are reflected by dropouts (13.6%), class avoidance (8.8%), interference with classmates' learning (11.3%), and so on (Lee et al., 2001). When we define 'problematic schools' as those that have problems in both students' learning and discipline, 34.8% of secondary schools were identified as such; 10% of middle schools, 37.9% of general high schools, and 61.0% of vocational high schools fell under the same category. Only 29.2% of the secondary schools were free from being classified to have such problems (Lee et al., 2001).

Given the significance of the problem, this paper raises the following questions. What exactly is the nature of disruption in the classroom? What are the factors that prevent students from learning in schools? And what should be done to improve this situation? A new educational reform initiative of the Korean government will be introduced in relation to its 7th National Curriculum as a way to improve school education. Some other suggestions will then be discussed with respect to the importance of teaching and learning process to resolve the classroom breakdown.

The Nature of Recent School Crisis in Korea

Korea adopted a western-style education system after establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948. Ever since, it has undertaken a continuous process of education reforms (Ministry of Education, 2000). If we go back to the classrooms of about a decade ago, we can notice that things

have changed much. As shown in Table 1, in 1990 a typical Korean classroom was crowded with an average of 41.4 students in primary schools, 50.2 students in junior high schools, 53.6 students in general high schools, and 51.5 students in vocational high schools. In 2003, the average numbers of students in a primary, a junior high, and a high school classrooms were reduced to 33.9, 34.8, and 33.1, respectively (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development & Korean Educational Development Institute, 2001; 2003). The government has fully achieved its aim to have less than 35 students per class at least by 2003.

Nonetheless, the improved physical classroom environment does not yet appear to contribute to a better learning process of the students. In the past, there was order and respect in the classroom though it was overcrowded, and the students were paying attention to their teachers and learning from the materials. However, students have lately shown less interest in school materials, less respect to their teachers and school discipline, and less enthusiasm for attending school than they did before. Some students do not hesitate to say explicitly that the only reason they attend the school is to be associated with their friends and to just get a graduation certificate.

Additionally, many parents do not feel that their child is getting the quality of education they ought to have in the school. Most of them are putting their child in one or more after-school private programs in the hope of their child getting quality learning. Therefore 58.2% of the primary and secondary students are receiving private instruction outside school (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2001). According to a study by Kim and Kim (2002), 84.8% of the students had attended a private institution outside their schools at least once. Only 15.2% of the students had never attended a private institution. This means that a huge proportion of family income is being spent on extra private educational services.

In 2001, the total private educational expenditure was 16,700,000,000,000 Korean Won (about 14 billion US dollars) in Korea (Kim, 2002). The statistics indicate that an

Table 1. *Number of Students per Class by School Level and Year*

	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003
Elementary School	62.1	56.7	51.5	44.7	41.4	36.4	35.8	33.9
Junior High School	62.1	64.5	62.1	61.7	50.2	48.2	38.0	34.8
General High School	60.1	59.8	59.9	58.0	53.6	48.0	44.1	33.1*
Vocational High School	56.1	57.0	59.6	55.5	51.5	47.9	40.3	

* The figure represents the mean number of students per class for general and vocational high schools.

average 1,335,000 Won (Korean currency equivalent to about US\$1,113) is spent annually by each household on private instruction outside school (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2001). Actually the private educational expenditure that each household has to pay becomes a very complicated problem that is at the center of national debates and does not allow an immediate answer to the questions involved. It is certain, however, that at least one of the reasons for parents' excessive expenditure for their child's learning outside school comes from a distrust of school based education.

Meanwhile, the teachers' concern, frustration, helplessness, and even anger with students' behavior and lack of motivation is increasing, and most teachers agree that it gets harder for them to do their job correctly. Some teachers even describe the classroom as a battlefield.

There always have been the problems similar to these; not every student has been eager to learn, not every parent has been satisfied with the quality of school education, and not every teacher has enjoyed teaching or has had meaningful interaction with students. However, the recent dissatisfaction and distrust among the three educational core parties are not only on a significantly large scale but also of a nature different from the past (Yi et al., 2000). As Yi et al. (2000) puts it, it is now a crisis of *effectiveness* of school education while it was a crisis of *justification* of it in the past.

Around 1999, some sections of the media and a group of teachers started to describe this problematic school situation as 'school collapse' (Chun, 1999; Korean Broadcasting Station, 1999) or 'classroom collapse' (Chosun Ilbo, 1999; Sisa Journal, 1999), both of which are rather sensational terms, meaning specifically the breakdown in classrooms. What do we exactly mean by this term classroom breakdown? The meaning becomes obvious when we look into the cases of other countries. Some reports similar to these situations are found in Japan and the U.S as shown in Table 2.

In Japan, a phenomenon called 'class collapse' has been spreading rapidly since 1997 especially in its primary schools (Chi, 1999). The researchers speculated that one cause for 'class collapse' in Japanese primary schools might be related to the recent preschoolers' behavioral and emotional changes.

In a survey conducted with 456 caregivers in four cities of Japan, 85% of the caregivers reported a notable increase of self-centered preschoolers, 79.5% of them reported a visible increase of preschoolers' violent behavior and bad language, and 74% of them reported the preschoolers' lack of desirable everyday habits and their disposition to panic easily (Chi, 1999). Chi argued that education of the families and the local areas did not seem to have functioned very successfully in these children's early stages of development. These children were not equipped with basic social abilities and skills of self-control required to get along with other people in school. Additionally she also argued that this failure to educate children to control their emotions and stress might be a main factor for 'class collapse' (Chi, 1999).

Overall, 'class collapse' in Japan may be summarized with the following behavioral indicators (NHK, 1998 quoted from Chi, 1999).

- Textbooks and notebooks not ready even after class started
- Hitting or playing with a classmate during the class
- Standing up and moving around during the class
- Tearing apart the worksheets or handouts
- Throwing away erasers or other objects during the class
- Stepping out of the room without permission during the class

Some of these indicators accord with the Korean teacher's description of his classroom in the beginning of this paper. However, the Japanese school crisis is more related to students' disciplinary problems, whereas the Korean situation is more connected to students' loss of interest in classroom learning as many researchers have pointed out (Kim, M., 1999; Kim, Y. H., 1999; Yi et al., 2000).

In the U.S., a sense of crisis in schooling has long existed since Silberman wrote his book entitled, *The Crisis in the Classroom: the Remaking of American Education* in 1970. In the document named *A Nation at Risk*, which was published by the Reagan administration in 1983, the U.S. government expressed its concern about the students' low educational

Table 2. *Terms Used for Explaining School Crisis in Three Nations*

Nation	Terms Used	Year around When the Term Used	Meaning
Japan	Class Collapse	1997	Discipline Failure
U.S.	School Failure	1970	Low Academic Achievements
Korea	School Collapse	1999	Disinterest in Classroom Learning

achievements that might lower the nation's competitiveness (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Additionally, in his writing of *The Myth of Public School Failure*, Rothstein (1993) summarized conventional claims for the failure of public schools in terms of students graduating without skills required for a technologically advanced economy, doubled school funding without visible improvements, stagnant or declining academic achievements, and teachers smothered by bureaucracy. Gross (1999) also discussed school failure in the book entitled, *The Conspiracy of Ignorance: The Failure of American Public Schools*. Recently with the belief that no child should be left behind and 'failing schools' should have no place, the Bush Administration is leading a nationwide educational reform program where every child's school achievement and school accountability are greatly emphasized (Bush, 2001; NCLB, 2003). As seen in these examples, in the U.S. the term, 'school failure' has been used to describe the unsuccessful role of schools in creating social equality and producing students with high achievements. This is very different from the Japanese use of 'class collapse' or the Koreans' use of 'school collapse.' The 'school failure,' in its recent use in the U.S., is basically indicating students' low academic performance and failure of education to bring equality into the society (Um, 1999; Yi et al., 2000).

This is not the case of Korea since Korean students' achievements are still high when measured by several international comparative tests (Krauthammer, 1990; OECD, 2001; Sorensen, 1994). Sorensen (1994), for example, reported that Korean students have achieved the highest mean scores in mathematics and science on the International Assessment of Educational Progress (IAEP) administered by the Educational Testing Services in 19 countries. Additionally, the OECD- PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study showed that the Korean 15-year-old students ranked 1st, 2nd, and 6th in science, mathematics, and reading, respectively among 32 participating OECD member economies (OECD, 2001).

However, the problem is that Korean students do not learn in school; rather they learn through other means or in other places such as through expensive private tutoring services or in private institutes established primarily for the purpose of profit. The parents send their children to cram schools even though it becomes extra financial burden to them, and thus they complain about the inevitable situation. They fear that their child would drop behind if they do not provide him/her with additional learning outside school.

The students' heavy reliance on out-of-school educational

services in turn accelerates prevention of their learning in the school classroom, let alone the excessive financial burden of parents. The fact that learning is not happening in school as effectively as it was before is the core nature of the school crisis in Korea. The school crisis that Korea has experienced lately is not the same as the problem of classroom discipline in Japan or with the problem of low student achievement levels as in the U.S. The core nature of Korean school crisis is related to the absence of quality learning in school. The following journal by a junior high school student shows what this means (Park et al., 1990).

My school day begins with entering the school gate, anxious of being picked for a violation of dress code by the teacher standing by the gate. After I spend a usual morning session of independent learning, copying my classmate's homework, I have to endure the boring lessons of seven periods. Then I go to a private institute for out-of-school learning and come back home when it's really dark. After I eat late dinner, then it's already 11:00 p.m. Being exhausted, I go to bed. For the kids who achieve high grades, they just suffer from anxiety of test scores. But for those who are behind without basic skills and knowledge and thus getting worse, everyday in school is a great struggle hard to bear. We are told to listen to what the teachers say even if we can't comprehend it, to write down the parts that we don't understand, and to sit still in front of our desk without permission to chat with our friends.

The Factors Leading to Classroom Breakdown

What are the factors that contribute to Korean students' loss of motivation to learn in the classroom? One factor may be the heavy reliance on out-of-school private learning as described before. However, this is also a result of low quality learning in school. Thus, a resolution cannot be found in simply banning or otherwise limiting private learning.

Many people including researchers, teachers, educational administrators identified three main factors that lead to a school crisis in general in Korea as follows: first being the limitations of schooling in not effectively coping with the new era of information technology and a consumption-oriented culture (Um, 1999), second being the clash between generations and between youth culture and school culture (Kim, M., 2000), and third being recent unsuccessful education policies resulting in a deterioration of teachers' authority and teachers' control over students (Kim, Y. H., 1999; Kim, W.,

2000; Yoon et al., 1999).

However, there are few studies or arguments that place stress on the lack of effectiveness of classrooms and learning environments that should be created by both teachers and students. Placing its major stress on educational process, this paper argues that the generation of effective teaching and intensive learning in classrooms is key to resolving classroom breakdown.

In an extensive survey of teachers' and students' perceptions of school education (Yi et al., 2000), 45.7% of the students responded that only about 1/3 of the class paid attention to teachers' lessons. For the reasons that the rest 2/3 of the students did not pay attention, 39.3% responded that they did not like the subject, 21.0% responded that the teacher did not teach well enough for them to understand, and 14.5% responded that they already learned the materials elsewhere. When asked how much they understood the lessons, 67.3% of the students responded that they understood less than 1/3 of the lessons.

Next, the students were asked about the barriers that made it hard for them to have interest in and enjoy class. 42.4% of the students pointed to the curriculum or textbooks that were not matched to their personal characteristics and abilities. 31.8% of them pointed to teachers' boring teaching styles (Yi et al., 2000). Qualitative research done also by these researchers (Yi et al., 2000) brought out the notion that the

students felt bored when the materials were not interesting or when the teachers did not induce rapport with them. The students did not show any responses to the teachers who taught only the textbook contents monotonously without any additional substance of learning, to those teachers who did not provide clear explanations, and to those teachers who presented the materials without much interaction with students.

From the review of survey findings in the literature, three elements can be drawn as the possible reasons for lack of classroom effectiveness and intensity. One is the failure of the current education system to seriously consider students' preference over certain subject areas. The second one is low quality of lesson materials and teachers' lack of preparedness. The final element is failure of the instructional process that does not induce students' initiative for their own learning and a lack of meaningful interaction between students and teachers.

A New Approach by the Korean Government in School Curriculum

While the empirical research indicated that students' being unable to choose what they wanted to learn in school was one of the major reasons why they did not learn in the classroom, the Korean government has already come to

Table 3. *The National Common Basic Subjects for Grades 1-10*

School	Grade	Subject Area
Elementary	1	Korean Language, Mathematics, Disciplined Life, Intelligent Life, Pleasant Life, We Are the First Graders
	2	Korean Language, Mathematics, Disciplined Life, Intelligent Life, Pleasant Life
	3-6	Korean Language, Moral Education, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Practical Arts, Physical Education, Music, Fine Arts, English
Junior High	7-9	Korean Language, Moral Education, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, Practical Arts, Physical Education, Music, Fine Arts, English
High	10	Korean Language, Moral Education, Social Studies including Korean History, Mathematics, Science, Technology or Home Economics, Physical Education, Music, Fine Arts, English
	11-12	Elective Courses

Table 4. *High School Electives for Grades 11-12*

Subject Area	General Elective Courses	Intensive Elective Courses
Korean Language	Korean Language Life	Speech, Reading, Composition, Grammar, Literature
Moral Education	Civic Ethics	Ethics and Thought, Traditional Ethics
Social Studies	Human Society and Environment	Korean Geography, World Geography, Economic Geography, World History, Korean Modern and Contemporary History, Law and Society, Politics, Economics, Society and Culture
Mathematics	Practical Mathematics	Mathematics I & II, Calculus, Probability and Statistics, Discrete Mathematics
Science	Life and Science	Physics I & II, Chemistry I & II, Biology I & II, Earth Science I & II
Technology/ Home Economics	Information Society and Computer	Agricultural Science, Industrial Technology, Enterprise Management, Ocean Science, Home Science
Physical Education	Gymnastics and Health	Gymnastics Theory, Practice in Physical Education
Music	Music and life	Music Theory, Practice in Music
Fine Arts	Art and Life	Art Theory, Practice in Art
Foreign Languages	German I, French I, Spanish I, Chinese I, Japanese I, Russian I, Arabic I	English I & II, English Conversation, English Reading Comprehension, English Composition, German II, French II, Spanish II, Chinese II, Japanese II, Russian II, Arabic II
Chinese Characters And Classics	Chinese Characters and Classics	Chinese Classical Literature
Military Training	Military Training	
Liberal Arts	Philosophy, Logic, Psychology, Education, Life Economy, Religion, Ecology and Environment, Future Career and Occupation, Others	

realize the importance of students' own input in their learning process to nurture their creativity, and thus initiated reforms to the school curriculum to enable students to choose the subjects that they want to learn.

Before 2002, Korean students who attended general high schools did not have elective courses. All students had the same curriculum from Grades 1-12. There were two exceptions. One was to select their own track in Grade 11

from three tracks of *Humanities and Social Science*, *Natural Science*, and *Arts and Sports* within a school. Once they selected one of the tracks, all students in the same track took the same curriculum. The other choice that the students had was to select a second foreign language such as French, German, Chinese, Japanese, and so on depending upon what their school offered. This posed a problem with students' motivation to learn with such few choices available to them.

The new 7th National Curriculum was announced in 1997 and first implemented in schools in 2003 by the Ministry of Education (now the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development since 2001). This is a student-centered curriculum aiming to facilitate students' autonomy and creativity. The two focal characteristics of autonomy and creativity were perceived by the policy makers as two of the most important abilities required for leadership in the 21st century era of globalization and information technology. As shown in Table 3 and Table 4, the new curriculum is composed of *National Common Basic Subjects* for Grades 1-10 and *Elective Courses* for Grades 11-12 (Ministry of Education, 1997).

Every student is required to take the 10 *National Common Basic Subjects* until Grade 10 (see Table 3), and then he/she can select *Elective Courses* from two levels of difficulty, general elective (over 24 units) and intensive elective courses (below 112 units) (see Table 4).

For some common basic subjects such as Korean language, social studies, science, and English, students can also choose from two levels of 'in-depth' and 'supplementary' classes. The basic idea of these options is to give students more autonomy in choosing levels of difficulty as well as subject matter, depending upon their interest, aptitude, and ability.

In addition, *Optional Activities* and *Extracurricular Activities* are included in the curriculum to promote students' self-directed learning and to meet the unique educational needs of individual schools and the demand of students. There are two kinds of *Optional Activities*: being related to subject matter and being concerned with nurturing creativity. *Extracurricular Activities* take all forms of school club activities, social services, and participation in certain school or community events. Students are supposed to have 2-4 hours a week for optional activities and 1-2 hour(s) a week for extracurricular activities, getting more hours with higher grades.

The Korean government expects that implementation of the new curriculum will help bring vitality and zeal for learning in classrooms and improve students' autonomy and

creativity by providing students with more choice. This year was the first year in which students of 11th grade had the freedom to choose their own elective courses. There have been some positive and negative reports on this. Some argued that students definitely had a more focused, individualized curriculum than before. But others complained that students did not yet have complete freedom of choice due to the temporary shortage of teachers in certain subject areas. The level of difficulty was not successfully scaled to students' ability in the classroom as most schools did not provide the 'in-depth' and 'supplementary' classes separately.

To fulfil the government's original intention with the new curriculum implementation, it is needless to say that there should be close partnerships and networking arrangements among the Ministry, City and Provincial Educational Authorities, schools, teachers, parents, and students. In other words, many cooperative decisions should be made among these educational stakeholders on appropriate physical environments such as optimal school and class size for implementing this new curriculum. Insuring sufficient classrooms and teachers, systematizing easy access to libraries and information, and providing a variety of teaching and learning materials are examples of the urgent tasks needing to be accomplished in collaboration among the decision makers at the national, local, and individual school levels. At the same time, teachers, parents, and students should understand their changing roles in the new system of student-initiated learning.

Hong (2001) provided eleven prerequisites for successful implementation of the 7th curriculum allowing students' choices: (1) diversity of, (2) high quality of, (3) sequential and interdependent nature of, and (4) balance of elective courses when they are provided by the school, (5) availability of detailed descriptions of each elective subject, (6) sufficient teachers, (7) the system in which students can select teachers as well as subject matters, (8) easy access to and (9) routine career guidance in schools, (10) students' determination on their choices, and (11) enough classrooms. With respect to these aspects, careful scrutiny and empirical research is required to determine the educational effectiveness of this new curriculum upon students' learning in the near future.

Some Suggestions to Resolve Classroom Breakdown

While the government tries to implement the new curriculum to boost up students' autonomy and creativity, some other measures are suggested to improve the

instructional quality of teachers as well as to increase students' motivation. First, the teachers should be provided with the conditions in which they can concentrate on teaching; the jobs of teaching include initial planning, setting learning goals, analyzing content, developing teaching materials, preparing for lessons, devising ways to increase students' motivation and to accommodate individual students' needs and differences, and making decisions on how to organize the classroom activities and how to evaluate students' performance objectively and fairly.

This suggestion may sound too obvious to draw any special attention. However, Korean teachers are often not provided with the luxury of engaging in the above aspects of their profession. They suffer from having to play a variety of other roles (Kim, 2001). They should be an administrator who tracks down all the reports on students' attendance and gives penalties on any violations of school or classroom regulations. They should be a counselor who provides students with individual advice on career choice and advancement to the next educational institution. They should be a school psychologist who offers clinical advice on matters such as relationship with friends, family problems, religious beliefs and values, school violence and so on. Moreover, they spend time doing a great deal of secretarial jobs such as making reports and various statistics tables. They should take care of keeping classrooms and school bathrooms clean and should assure lunchtime order in the classroom, where the students eat their lunch. They should lead the students in all kinds of school meetings as well as club activities. All of these are compulsory duties of Korean teachers in addition to teaching his/her subject. Therefore, these teachers have too many other duties to prepare for quality instruction. The quality of instructional materials, process of teaching, and the evaluation method is likely to be sacrificed in this situation. Therefore, in order to prepare for quality instruction teachers should be freed from non teaching duties and should be provided with incentives for quality teaching, or at least the other roles should be substantially reduced.

Another suggestion is related to facilitation of teacher-student interaction. The traditional and still conventional method of instruction in the current Korean classroom is a teacher-centered, mono-directional learning, where teachers decide the contents of classes and give prepared lectures to students without considering students' individual characteristics. In order to induce meaningful and active interaction between teacher and student or among students in the classroom, the class size or the ratio of student vs. teacher is important. This would particularly so in facilitating students' higher mental

functions such as analysis, reasoning, application, incorporation, and transfer. In small-sized class, students can get increased individual attention and time from the teacher, which results in highly intellectual as well as personally meaningful interactions with the teachers. As the class size of Korean classrooms is dramatically reduced in 2003, teachers' instructional process should fully utilize the benefit of the reduced class size and be tailored to encourage students' self-directed learning and autonomy. Teachers should adopt and try new instructional methods to organize their lessons and guidance in a way to accept individual differences in students' needs, abilities, and cognitive or learning styles and thus to increase interpersonal interaction which is meaningful to students.

A final suggestion is made with respect to students' motivation to learn. The importance of students' motivation in their learning process cannot be overemphasized. In order to increase students' interest, options should be offered to the students in selecting not only school subjects but also classroom tasks, the levels of the tasks, home assignments, and so on. Many researchers showed that students' intrinsic motivation such as personal interest and enjoyment increased with the degree of autonomy given to them (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan, 1993).

Traditionally, without many classroom options, Korean children's motivation to learn came mostly from external sources such as parents' rewards or punishments, teachers' compliments, peer admiration or contempt, college admission, and so on. Though these extrinsic motivations have been clearly beneficial to students' learning process, the traditional method of teachers' imposing learning is no longer effective. Today's students would simply not follow teachers' directions and guidance if they do not want to (Kim, 1999). They claim more autonomy. This is not so much because the students have become rude but because society has matured. If the students' need of autonomy in their learning process is not satisfied properly during the class, they will not pay attention to the teaching process, which is meaningless to them. This inattention has partly contributed to classroom breakdown as discussed in this paper.

Conclusion

This paper described the current situation of Korean schools that has often been referred to as 'school collapse' or 'classroom breakdown' since around 1999 and argued that the nature of this crisis could be characterized as 'students' disinterest in classroom learning' among other possible

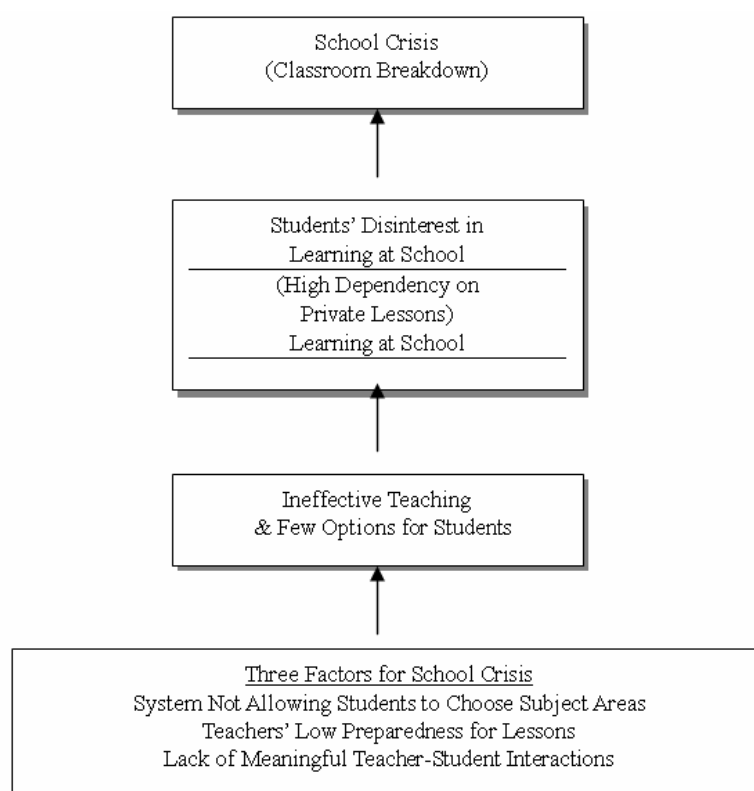


Figure 1. *Three Factors of School Crisis pertaining to Teaching and Learning Process in Classroom*

characterizations of the phenomenon. When characterized as it was, this paper attempted to focus on *teaching and learning process itself* as one of the core aspects of the Korean school crisis.

The three factors contributing to the lack of effectiveness and intensity of classroom teaching and learning were highlighted in Figure 1: first being the system (e.g., curriculum) where students' preference over certain subject areas were ignored, second being the teachers' low preparedness for lessons, and third being the traditional unidirectional instructional process with little room for meaningful interaction with students.

The 7th National Curriculum developed by the Ministry

of Education in order to promote students' autonomy and creativity is evaluated as being the correct direction from the perspective of this paper, which regards the current Korean school crisis as the problem of students' losing their interests in school learning with very few options open to them. However, initial contrasting reports on the feasibility and effectiveness of the actual implementation of the new curriculum necessitates a great deal of careful empirical research in the future to draw solid and accurate conclusions.

As the new curriculum is expected to help students learn in school classrooms, the present paper made some suggestions to promote the quality of teaching and thus to increase students' motivation to learn. As Table 5 summarizes,

Table 5. *Suggestions for Effective Teaching and Intensive Learning*

1. Reducing teachers' other duties than teaching, and giving incentives for quality teaching
2. Changing teachers' instructional methods to accept individual differences of students and to increase meaningful interactions with students
3. Providing students with options to select classroom activities and assignments

it first pointed out that Korean teachers had too many responsibilities to prepare for high quality instruction and thus suggested that they be freed from their other duties so that they could concentrate on teaching and to offer incentives for good teaching.

The second point to improve the quality of teaching is to encourage both the quantity and quality of active teacher-student interaction in the context of various ongoing classroom activities. It was hard in the past for teachers to have individual, meaningful interaction with every student in their classrooms of 50 students, for example. Now the class size has fortunately decreased to less than 35, so the task has become less challenging and is now a reasonable possibility. Finally students' autonomy and freedom of choice were emphasized, regardless as to whether the choice was related to the subject areas, subject matter, group projects, or individual assignments.

This paper attempted to identify the factors which have lead to the current school crisis in Korea with the emphasis on the actual teaching and learning process in the classroom. A future study, taking the present paper as a starting point, could utilize new forthcoming data to examine the causality between the suggested measures and positive changes, if any, in students' academic motivation in schools.

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